

Minerva

Corneal tattoos provide an interesting solution for disfiguring corneal scars. Varying shades of drawing ink can be put into the anterior corneal stroma by using punctures made by a conventional spatula needle. For a week after the operation patients notice a moderate sensation of having a foreign body sensation and have conjunctival redness, but they seem happy with the results (*British Journal of Ophthalmology* 2002;86:397-9).

Oxidative stress increases significantly in people undergoing dialysis and is a risk factor for accelerated atherosclerosis. Korean doctors devised a randomised controlled study to see if hormone replacement therapy had any impact on oxidative stress and antioxidant capacity in 70 postmenopausal women undergoing dialysis. They found that hormone replacement therapy had a favourable effect, concurring with its effects in the general population (*Renal Failure* 2002;24:49-57).

Minerva recalls the days when some junior doctors ill advisedly used skateboards to navigate the long corridors of hospitals. Now it's scooters. A randomised crossover experiment to see if dashing with scooters to in-hospital emergencies offers any benefits over conventional running found that riders' pulse rates were significantly lower on arrival. Manual dexterity and response times, however, were not improved (*Resuscitation* 2002;52:293-6).

A writer in *Surgery* (2002;131:228-9) recalls a novel way of trying to preserve donated kidneys before transplantation. Reading the contents label on a coffee creamer carton, a colleague wondered about the purpose of the monoglycerides and diglycerides it contained. On hearing they were emulsifiers to help keep lipid materials in solution, he tried using coffee creamer to solubilise the fats in the kidney perfusion solution. Sadly (but perhaps not surprisingly) the attempt failed.

Alzheimer's disease and amyloidosis share a common molecular foundation: protein misfolding. Scientists took harmless proteins from cattle and bacteria and pushed them into new shapes. The new forms made the proteins highly toxic to cells in culture before they turned into large insoluble clusters. Finding ways to break up rogue proteins before they aggregate could prove critical (*Nature* 2002;416:507-11).

What's the first bit of the brain to go in Alzheimer's disease? Not surprisingly, three

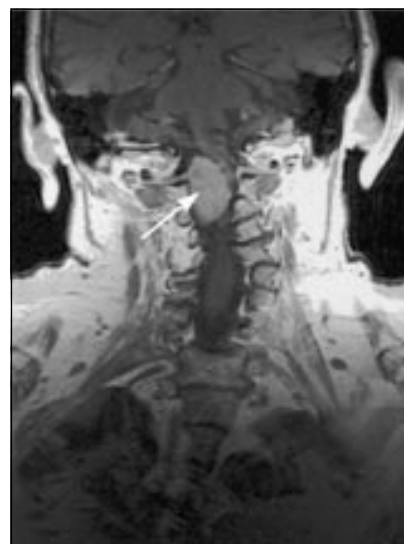
dimensional magnetic resonance mapping of what areas of brain atrophy over time has shown that the parts of the brain involved with memory have rapid tissue loss early on. The parts of the brain implicated in functions such as speech and perception take longer to atrophy. These observations will provide a useful tool for assessing the efficacy of potential treatments (*Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 2002;99:4703-7).

Women with irritable bowel syndrome say their symptoms often get worse around the time of their period. A small study of women with the syndrome found that their rectal sensitivity changes around the time of menstruation, whereas in healthy women it does not. The authors say these cyclical changes suggest that women with irritable bowel syndrome respond differently to changes in levels of sex hormones (*Gut* 2002;50:471-4), and that this may shed light on some of the mechanisms of visceral sensitisation.

For reasons that are largely unknown, endometriosis causes impaired fertility and surgical removal improves the situation. Despite attempts to surgically clear endometriosis, most women end up falling into one of two groups—complete and incomplete surgery. Japanese surgeons found that complete clearance offers a better fertility outcome, and have developed novel laparoscopic techniques to clear the deeper pelvic and rectal areas, which are often out of reach (*Gynecologic and Obstetric Investigation* 2002;53(suppl 1):12-8).

Paternal, but not maternal, longevity seems to protect men against coronary disease. A Swedish prospective follow up study of over 6000 men aged 51-59 has found that their death rate from heart disease decreased continuously with increasing age of the father, while the effect of an ageing mother was less striking. The relation holds independent of cardiovascular risk factors (including a history of myocardial infarction) among the fathers (*Journal of Internal Medicine* 2002;251:258-67).

The feasibility and cost effectiveness of school health screening programmes are hotly debated. Some countries have stopped these altogether. Adolescent screening for orthopaedic problems in one Israeli high school identified previously undiagnosed abnormalities (especially spinal deformities) in 14.8% over five years. As osseous maturation is almost complete in 14-18 year old girls, the authors say that screening is ideally



A 73 year old woman reported dysphagia over the previous two years. Endoscopy and manometry did not help to elucidate the cause. When she reported leg weakness, examination showed long tract signs. Magnetic resonance imaging showed an enhancing, intradural lesion compressing the nerve roots and spinal cord between C1 and C3. A benign meningioma was completely excised after laminectomy, and she is making a good recovery.

Intraspinal lesions are a rare but recognised cause of dysphagia. Branches from the C1-3 nerve roots contribute to the ansa cervicalis and provide the fibres of the extradural portion of the hypoglossal nerve. Denervation will affect the muscles involved in the non-voluntary phase of swallowing.

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carried out between the ages of 10 and 12 (*Public Health* 2002;116:30-2).

King's College Hospital in London runs Europe's largest liver transplant programme and has recently celebrated its 2000th liver transplant. The unit is pleased to announce that the heaviest liver removed weighed 10 kg, the most blood lost during a transplant was 160 litres, the longest current survivor was operated on 25 years ago, and the longest operation took 16 hours.